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ABSTRACT

This brief document profiles Maryland's Early Learning Support Network. The Network includes a group of early childhood centers in public schools in the state. The centers serve as training and observation sites for persons interested in improving the quality of their early learning programs. Two types of centers are involved: observation centers that provide opportunities for interested persons to observe high quality programs in operation, and support centers that provide field experiences for persons endeavoring to strengthen their knowledge and skill in areas related to the implementation of early childhood programs. Both types of centers were selected because they exemplify excellence, diversity, and effectiveness in the provision of educational programs for young children. Sections of the document provide: (1) an overview; (2) underlying premises; (3) objectives; (4) a statement of procedures for becoming involved with support centers, including the interested person's desire for and efforts at improvement, the observation and practice of improvement strategies, and the implementation and institutionalization of improvement strategies; and (5) a brief statement of procedures for contacting observation centers. (RH)

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Early Learning Support Network

PS 019383

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OVERVIEW

The Early Learning Support Network is a group of early childhood centers in public schools throughout the state. They serve as training and observation sites for persons interested in improving the quality of their own early learning programs. The network comprises two types of centers. Observation Centers provide opportunities for interested persons to see, feel, and hear high quality programs in operation. Support Centers provide field experiences for persons endeavoring to strengthen their knowledge and skill in particular areas related to the implementation of early childhood programs. Both types of centers exemplify excellence, diversity, and effectiveness in the provision of educational programs for young children.

UNDERLYING PREMISES

- Persons who implement early learning programs have few, if any, opportunities to observe other high quality programs in operation.
- Early learning staff want and will voluntarily pursue training opportunities that enable them to see, to feel, and become immersed in a high quality program.
- Providing the opportunity for early learning staff to visit a high quality program and work in a collegial manner with exemplary peers for self-determined purposes is a motivating and effective strategy for program improvement.

OBJECTIVES

- To provide a network of observation centers for persons interested in seeing high quality early learning programs in operation
- To provide a network of professional development centers where new and experienced early learning staff can work in a collegial relationship with exemplary peers to strengthen and/or revitalize their competencies in providing quality programs for young children
- To exemplify diversity within quality in the provision of public school prekindergarten and other public school early learning programs
- To provide a vehicle for disseminating information about promising and innovative practices in early childhood education

OPERATIONAL PROCEDURES FOR SUPPORT CENTERS

Stage I - Desiring and Seeking Improvement

At the home school

1. The teacher, either independently or as a result of feedback from the principal or central office staff, desires to make programmatic changes and clearly defines the type of changes desired.
2. The teacher reviews each support center's objectives and determines if the changes desired can be facilitated through a field experience at one of them. The teacher then identifies the center whose objectives best match his/her needs.

3. The teacher, principal, or central office personnel contacts a specialist in the Early Learning Section, Maryand State Department of Education, to schedule a date for the field experience.

4. The teacher completes the Support Center Visitation Form to identify who will visit and for what purposes. The form is signed by the principal and early childhood supervisor and sent to the Support Center.

Stage II - Observing and Practicing Improvement Strategies

At the Support Center

1. Day 1, A.M. -The visiting team observes the program in operation, paying particular attention to those aspects of the program that relate to the specified purposes for their visit. They take notes and record questions for later discussion.

2. Day 1, P.M. - The visiting team and Center teacher meet. The Center teacher answers questions about the program and provides theoretical and practical information to help the visiting team understand and acquire new skills/strategies. The Center teacher and visiting team plan cooperatively for the following day. The visiting team gathers and prepares materials needed to implement the plan.

3 Day 2, A.M. - The visiting team practices the new skills/strategies while the Center teacher observes. During those times in which the new skills/strategies are not being practiced, the visiting and Center teams implement the program together.

4 Day 2, P.M. - The visiting team and Center teacher meet. The Center teacher gives the visiting team feedback about its effectiveness in using the new skills/ strategies. The Center teacher also helps the team transfer the skills/strategies to its own program. Together they develop an action plan for implementation in the home school.

Stage III - Implementing and "Institutionalizing" Improvement Strategies

At the local school

1. The teacher shares the action plan with the principal and/or central office support staff. They modify it as needed to ensure that the new skills or strategies fit local program guidelines and implementation policies. They agree on a date that implementation can be observed.

2. The action plan is implemented.

3. The principal and or central office support staff observe the implementation of the action plan and provide feedback to further help the teacher integrate the strategies into daily and routine practice.

4. The teacher assesses the impact of the changes on the quality of the program.

OPERATIONAL PROCEDURES FOR OBSERVATION CENTERS

To arrange a visit

1. Contact the school principal directly. Identify the purposes for and persons who will make the visit. Limit the number of visitors to four (4) per visit.

2. Confirm arrangements with the principal in writing.

3. Arrive at and leave the Center on time. If there is a delay in arriving, notify the school principal.

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